

GIs Will Form Strategic Reserve

Limits of Latest U.S. Commitment Still Not in Sight

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The limits and implications of the latest U.S. commitment in Viet-Nam are still not in sight.

What the State Department's announcement means is that U.S. combat troops established at half a dozen enclaves along the South Vietnamese coast can now be considered a strategic reserve to the South Vietnamese army, available for commitment to pitched battles against hard-core Viet Cong units. What it portends for the future is harder to judge. It is almost certainly true that no one in the United States Government could answer that question.

News Analysis

20,000 additional American combat troops. More Casualties Expected

It implies that U.S. casualties in Viet-Nam must be expected soon to dwarf the modest losses accepted to date.

And it implies that if the Viet Cong rainy-season offensive turns out to be even stronger than the minimum that must now providently be anticipated, the Administration will soon be faced, if it is not already faced, with even more painful decisions to commit even larger contingents of American troops to the war.

Present American troop strength in Viet-Nam was reported yesterday as 51,000 of whom nearly 20,000 are combat troops such as the Marines assigned to the Danang complex, and of whom many more are exposed to combat as individual advisers to South Vietnamese

army units or as combat pilots.

The minimum additional reinforcement that must now be expected, some 20,000 additional combat troops, would bring this total to about 70,000.

But if things continue to go badly, as they plainly are now, a commitment of 100,000 or more Americans may come to seem unavoidable.

The objective of this American commitment is reasonably clear: It is to defeat a Viet Cong attempt to move their revolution into a third and climactic phase, large-scale open combat with the South Vietnamese regular army.

It is in this phase of essentially conventional combat operations that U.S. troops are likely to be most effective, and it is in this role that they are needed.

Although there is sentiment in the military for American troops to under-

take a combat role against Viet Cong guerrillas—as opposed to their hard-core regular units—there is no sign of sentiment in that direction among the senior civilians in the Administration.

Essentially Defensive

In this sense, the latest U.S. commitment remains limited and essentially defensive in nature.

The problem of how limited that commitment can remain on the progress of the Viet Cong's summer offensive. Some of the impendables involved there are how strong the Viet Cong really are, how far Hanoi will go in introducing, as it has already begun to do—

substantial numbers of native North Vietnamese regulars into the south, and how well the South Vietnamese regular army will fare in relatively large-scale open combat with hard-core, well-armed Viet Cong units. But this is not all of the

problem that now faces the President.

Dissension Apparent

No one knows how well the shaky South Vietnamese Government is going to survive the dissension among the loyalists that has been so apparent for several weeks. And no one knows how the Administration will react to the inevitable domestic pressures to escalate the war against the North still more, with the implication of a major confrontation with the Russians, as American casualties mount.

The Administration is worried about all these things, most of all because it is no more sure than the public quite what they are all leading to.